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ABSTRACT

This report presents child-based data from the March 1983, Current Population Survey. The data have been reorganized from their usual form which is as information on households, families, or individual adults, to data with children as the unit of analysis. The primary focus of the report is on children's living arrangements: what kinds of families children live in and how the family and economic situations of children vary according to these differing living situations. The report finds that although a majority of all children live in two-parent families, a substantial number of children live for at least some period of time with only one parent. The report also finds that among these single parent situations there is great variation: 20.5% of all children live with their mothers and 2.0% with fathers. The children's economic and social status is better when living with divorced or widowed mothers than with separated or never married mothers (71% and 81% respectively of the latter two groups living in poverty). Children living alone with fathers enjoy a higher social and economic status. Children are, however, better off in two parent families with regard to the social and economic factors considered. Particularly striking are the very large race differences in family composition. For example, among whites, 81% of all children live in two-parent families, compared with 41% among blacks, and black children are disproportionately represented in the most disadvantaged family types. The paper includes a short bibliography and five tables giving the statistical data used for the study. (CG)

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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CORRELATES OF FAMILY STRUCTURE: A PORTRAIT OF U.S. CHILDREN IN 1983

by

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INTRODUCTION

Statistical information about the conditions and characteristics of children in the United States are often hard to come by. This is because much of the relevant data is gathered and reported with the family as the unit of analysis. Family-based statistics are useful, but when the focus is on children it is often more important to know not just how many families have low incomes or how many women are employed, but how many children live in low income families or have mothers in the labor force. Since the numbers of children in families vary considerably, and family size is often strongly related to variables such as income and maternal employment, the picture of children one obtains may change substantially when the child, rather than the family is used as the unit of analysis.

In the present report we present child-based data from the March, 1983, Current Population Survey. These data were generated by a special tabulation of the data routinely collected each March to provide information on employment and family income.* These data are collected from sampled households, and are normally reported on a household or family basis, or on an individual basis for adults. As the accompanying tables of this report show, it is possible to reorganize and report these data on a child basis. The primary focus of this report is children's living arrangements. In what kinds of families do children reside, and how do the family and economic situations of children vary by different living arrangements? In the discussion that follows, it is our hope to present these data in a useful format. As we proceed, we will highlight some of the facts that may be at variance with currently held views of children that have been formed on family-based statistics.

TRENDS IN FAMILY LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Much attention has been focused of late on the increasing prevalence of a variety of family forms, such as single-parent, female-headed families. While the number of these families has increased dramatically in the last decade, it is still the case that the great majority of children live in two-parent families, mostly with both biological or adoptive parents. Three-quarters of all U.S. children lived with two parents in 1983.** It is important to note,

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*Special thanks are expressed to Arthur Norton, Assistant Chief, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, who directed the preparation of these special tabulations.

**The data are presented in Tables 1-5. Table 1 shows the distribution of living arrangements in 1983 of U.S. children by race/ethnicity, with comparable data for all children in 1970 and 1980. Tables 2-5 show, within each living arrangement, the distribution of children by a number of social and economic characteristics. Table 2 includes race/ethnicity and maternal education; Table 3, number of siblings and mother's age; Table 4, maternal employment, income, and home ownership; and Table 5, poverty, child support, and welfare benefits.

however, that this is a decline from the level in 1970, when 85 percent lived in two-parent families. Also, some children in two-parent families are living with a biological and a step-parent. Glick (1979) estimated that 10 percent of all children lived in such families in 1978. The percentage is likely to be slightly higher for 1983. Still, nearly two-thirds of U.S. children were living with both biological or adoptive parents in 1983.

The second largest group of children are living with their mother only. The proportion in this group has nearly doubled since 1970--from 11 to 21 percent--and was still increasing in the early 1980s. This group can be further subdivided by the marital situation of the mother. When this is done, we see that the proportions living with divorced or never-married mothers have increased most rapidly, while the proportion living with separated mothers has increased more slowly (and may have even started to decline in recent years). The proportion living with widowed mothers has dropped, reflecting improvements in longevity.

Children living with their father only still comprise a small proportion of all children--2 percent in 1983. While this proportion is "double" that of 1970--1 percent--the increase of one percentage point is small compared with the 10 percentage-point increase for children living with their mother only. The proportions of children living with other relatives (2 percent) and with non-relatives (less than 1 percent) remain small and have changed little since 1970.

The living arrangements of children vary substantially by the race or ethnicity of the child. Black children are half as likely as white children to live with two parents, and are correspondingly three times as likely to live with their mother only. Among white children, 81 percent live in two-parent households and 15 percent live with their mother only. The corresponding percentages for blacks are 41 percent and 51 percent. Children of Spanish origin (most of whom define themselves as white) are mid-way between blacks and all whites -- 68 percent live with two parents and 27 percent live with their mother only. Among those living with their mother only, the percentage living with a never-married mother is very high for blacks compared with whites--24 percent versus 2 percent. The percentages living with a separated mother show a similar though not quite as dramatic disproportion--13 percent of black children are in such families compared with 3 percent for whites.

The proportions living with their fathers only or with non-relatives do not differ greatly by race or ethnicity. A slightly elevated proportion of blacks live with other relatives--5 percent versus 2 percent for white children.

CHILDREN LIVING IN TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

Most children with two parents enjoy numerous social and economic advantages. They tend to have well-educated mothers: 15 percent have a mother with a college degree or more, and only one in five has a

mother who has not completed high school. Children with two parents are not likely to be only children (only one in five) but neither are they likely to come from large families--those with three or more siblings. In addition, practically none has a mother under the age of 20, their average age being 35.

Most conspicuous are the economic advantages enjoyed by children in two-parent households. The median income of these children's families in 1982 was $26,672. Three in ten children in two-parent households share in annual incomes of $35,000 or more. Along with adequate income, other advantages are enjoyed by these children. Three-quarters live in houses that are being bought rather than rented. Only a minority of these children receive government welfare benefits: three percent reported receiving AFDC and 20 percent reported receiving one or more of the following government non-cash income-tested benefits: Food Stamps, Medicaid, subsidized housing, or a subsidized school lunch. By comparison, anywhere from 27 to 76 percent of children in other family living arrangements receive some form of benefit.

Part of the affluence of children with two parents in the home is due to the labor force participation of both parents -- over 60 percent have employed mothers. However, less than a quarter of the children in two-parent homes have mothers who work full-time, full-year. (Labor force participation is higher among divorced mothers of children. But since such mothers provide the only or primary source of support, their family income is much lower in spite of their employment.) Thus, most of the income advantage of children in two-parent families arises from having access to the relatively high earnings of a male worker. In addition, since educational attainment is higher in these families, the earnings of the parents are likely to be higher as a function of their greater schooling.

In spite of the economic advantages of this group, 13 percent of the children in two-parent families live in households that fall below the poverty line. While this is much less than children with other living arrangements, as we shall see, it still amounts to a sizeable proportion -- one out of eight children. In fact, in two-parent households the proportion of children with incomes below poverty is comparable to the 11 percent who live in households that enjoy incomes of $50,000 or more annually.

Children Living With Their Mother Only

We have already seen that between 1970 and 1983 there was a near doubling in the proportion of children under age 18 being raised by their mothers alone. Moreover, this dramatic increase occurred for both blacks and whites. In 1970, 29 percent of black children lived with their mother alone. This proportion increased to 51 percent in 1983. The white proportion rose from 8 to 15 percent. While the proportion nearly doubled for both races, the increase in terms of percentage points was far higher for blacks (22 points versus 7 points) due to their higher initial proportion.

The situation of children being raised by their mother alone differs dramatically from that of children with two parents in the household. Most striking is the relatively low economic status of these children. However, important differences exist between different types of mother-only families. Consequently, the family environment will be described separately for children whose mothers are divorced, separated, widowed and never-married.

Children living with divorced mothers. Overall, 8 percent of all children live with divorced mothers. These proportions vary only slightly by race, with 8 percent of white children, 11 percent of black children, and 8 percent of Spanish-origin children living with divorced mothers. Although over half of all black children live with their mothers only, few of these mothers are divorced. Thus while half of the white children in mother-only families live with divorced mothers, only about a fifth of black children do.

The children of divorced mothers experience significant social and economic disadvantages compared with children who have two parents. Their mothers have less education: only about 9 percent have mothers with college degrees compared with 15 percent of children with married mothers, and a somewhat higher proportion lack a high school diploma. It is important to note, however, that the educational levels of lone mothers have risen significantly in recent years. Among children living with a lone mother under age 45, for example, the proportion whose mother had completed high school rose from 45 percent in 1970 to 60 percent in 1979 (Glick, 1981).

The economic disadvantage of children living with divorced mothers is marked. Their median family income is only $10,000, compared with nearly $27,000 for children with two parents. Moreover, they are over three times as likely to be living in poverty -- 44 percent versus 13 percent. They are also considerably more likely to be receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or other government benefits, and only 42 percent live in a home their family owns.

The economic disadvantage of children with divorced mothers is even more striking in view of the high labor force participation of their mothers. Compared with children in two-parent families, children with divorced mothers are considerably more likely to have a mother in the labor force. Eighty-one percent of the children with divorced mothers have mothers who are either working or seeking work. Forty-three percent, a majority of those with mothers in the labor force, have mothers who are employed full-time, full-year, compared with only 22 percent of the children in two-parent households. It is likely that the economic disadvantage of these children is largely due to the dependence of the majority of these families on only one wage earner, and to the lower average wages of women in the labor market. It is true that many of these children receive child support payments. Even so, the proportion is less than half (41 percent). And earlier data from the Current Population Survey show that the average payment received -- for those who receive a payment -- is very low, being only about $1,800. (Current Population Reports, P-23, #112).

Divorce is most likely to occur fairly early in marriage. Also, being divorced reduces fertility in comparison with being married. As a consequence, children with divorced mothers are generally from smaller families. Thus, children living with divorced mothers are somewhat more likely to be only children (28 percent) compared with children living with two parents (21 percent); and not quite 12 percent have three or more siblings, compared with over 15 percent for those with two parents.

In spite of their disadvantages, children with divorced mothers are considerably better off economically than children with separated or never-married mothers, and are nearly as well off as children living with widowed mothers. We turn to a consideration of these groups next.

Children living with separated mothers. The category of separated mothers includes women in at least two situations. Some of the mothers are in transition between marriage and divorce, and will soon enter the category of divorced mothers, who are somewhat better off than other lone mothers. Other women in this category are likely to remain separated indefinitely. Those who remain separated are disproportionately black and are more economically disadvantaged. Thus, data for this sub-group represent an average of two somewhat different groups. Were we able to separate these two groups, it is certain that the situation of long-term separated would be even poorer.

Children living with separated mothers are disproportionately black. Only a little more than 3 percent of white children live with separated mothers, while nearly 13 percent of black children do. While black children account for only a fifth of all children with divorced mothers (see Table 2), they account for two-fifths of all children with separated mothers. Reflecting the lower socioeconomic status of separated mothers, 42 percent of children living with these mothers have a mother who has not completed high school, compared with 26 percent for children of divorced mothers. Only 4 percent have mothers who have completed college.

In contrast to children in divorced families, those living with separated mothers tend to be in larger families. They have 1.6 siblings on average, compared with 1.2 for children in divorced families. Only one in five have no siblings and 23 percent have three or more siblings, a higher proportion than any other group.

The relatively large size of families in this group poses barriers to the mother's employment and also requires that the family's income be stretched across more individuals. Only 25 percent of the children of separated mothers had mothers who worked full-time, full-year, compared with 43 percent of the children of divorced mothers. Although nearly two-thirds of the

children of separated mothers have mothers who are in the labor force, more than 9 percent had mothers who were unemployed.

With a median income of $6,067 and relatively large families, it is not surprising that 71 percent of the children of separated mothers live in poverty. Less than one percent of these children live in families with incomes of $35,000 or more. Forty-four percent of the children live in households that received AFDC and 76 percent receive at least one government non-cash income-tested benefit. Furthermore, only one in three children with a separated mother live in a home that their family either owns or is buying. In contrast to children of the divorced, few -- about one in five -- receive child support.

Children living with widowed mothers. Given falling mortality in the United States, the proportion of children experiencing the death of one of their parents while they are still children has declined substantially. Only 1.6 percent of the children under age 18 in 1983 lived with a widowed mother. (Another 0.2 percent lived with a widowed father.) Reflecting the higher mortality of blacks, 2.8 percent of black children live with a widowed mother compared with 1.5 percent of white children and 2.3 percent of Spanish-origin children.

Since mortality rates rise with age, children with widowed mothers tend to have mothers who are older than those in any of the other categories. Their average age is 42, compared with around 34 for the mothers of children in most other categories. Reflecting their older age, a relatively high proportion of these children have mothers who have not completed high school -- 39 percent compared with 20 percent among children with married mothers.

Several factors influence the number of siblings in the households of children of widowed mothers. The father's death, depending on when it occurred, may lower overall fertility. Furthermore, since the mothers are older, some of their children may be older than 17 and are thus not included in the count of siblings in the household. Both of these factors would tend to decrease overall family size and thus increase the proportion of only children in this group. Indeed 29 percent have no siblings in the home, compared with 21 percent for children in two-parent households. On the other hand, older mothers come from cohorts who had higher overall fertility, and being older, are more likely to have completed their childbearing (even before the death of the fathers). Consequently the proportion of children with three or more siblings may also be high, as indeed it is (20 percent compared with 15 percent for children with two parents).

Children with widowed mothers are less likely than most to have a mother in the labor force. Only 23 percent have mothers who are employed full-time, full-year. This may reflect both

the older age of these mothers (on average they are from age cohorts whose labor force participation has been lower than more recent cohorts), and the provision for some of a degree of financial security through insurance or survivors benefits. Indeed 8 percent enjoy incomes of $35,000 or more, the highest for any group of children living with their mother only. On the other hand, 44 percent of the children whose fathers have died live in poverty, compared with just 12.5 percent of the children living with two parents.

The participation rate of these children in AFDC is about average -- 11 percent. This is lower than for any other group of children living with a lone mother, but higher than for those living with two parents. Fifty-seven percent receive some type of government non-cash income-tested benefit, about the same as for children of divorced mothers. On the other hand, 62 percent of these children live in a home owned by their family, and they enjoy the highest median income of any of the mother-alone family types, presumably as a result of insurance and pension payments. Obviously there is great variability in the well-being of children whose fathers have died, some being well-provided for and many others living at the economic margin.

Never-married mothers. Looking across the several family types, the most disadvantaged children are those being raised by never-married mothers. These children are very disproportionately black, with black children accounting for 69 percent of the children being reared by never-married mothers. While the number of children born outside of marriage is increasing faster among whites than blacks, the proportion of all white children raised by a never-married mother is still much lower than that of blacks. Less than 2 percent of white children live in homes with a never-married mother compared with 24 percent of black children. The proportion of Spanish-origin children living with never-married mothers is intermediate at 7 percent, but far closer to the level among whites than that among blacks.

The children of never-married mothers are more likely to have no siblings than children in any of the other mother-alone categories. In part this reflects the young age of many of the mothers of these children; their average age is 27, and 12 percent of these children have mothers who are not yet 20. The low average age for this group reflects the fact that most single mothers do eventually marry.

The mothers of these children tend to be poorly educated as well as young: 48 percent of these children have mothers who have not completed high school; only 2 percent have mothers who have completed college. Since many of these mothers are still young, some may go on to complete more education. It is unlikely, though, that their ultimate level of educational attainment will place them above any of the other mother-only groups.

The economic situation of children being raised by a never-married mother is marginal at best. With only 0.1 percent having incomes of $35,000 or more, stories of glamorous and affluent women who choose to have a child though unmarried are clearly material for newspaper headlines. In fact, 81 percent of the children of never-married mothers live in poverty; 57 percent receive AFDC; and 84 percent receive at least one government non-cash income-tested benefit.

Although twenty-six percent of the children of unmarried mothers live in a home that is owned rather than rented, this may reflect a tendency among these families to reside with other family members. Even so, this proportion is the lowest home-ownership rate of any of the groups of children.

Children Living With Their Fathers Only

The social and economic circumstances of children living with their fathers differ in important ways from those of children living with their mothers alone. Although the proportion of such children is so small -- only 2 percent -- it is still possible to consider children separately according to the marital status of their father, as was done with mothers. Before considering these subgroups separately, it should be noted that children living with their father only are more likely to be older children, and more likely to be boys than are children in other living arrangements. Glick (1981) reports that 33 percent more boys than girls live with a separated or divorced father. We suspect that many adolescent boys may prefer to live with their fathers, and that their mothers may be more willing to let this happen.

Children living with divorced fathers. White children are slightly more likely to live with a divorced father than are black or Spanish-origin children and they account for 88 percent of the children living with divorced fathers. This contrasts with the situation for children living with a divorced mother; such children are disproportionately black. In other words, the tendency for children to live with their mother following a divorce is stronger for black children than for whites or Spanish-origin children.

Like other children living with a lone father, a large proportion of these children -- 46 percent -- have no siblings living with them, and only 5 percent have 3 or more siblings. Two factors may account for this. Custody of children following a divorce is generally more likely to be awarded to or assumed by the mother. This may be especially so for larger families. Also, to the extent that older children leave their mothers to live with their fathers, they may leave siblings behind.

While the economic situation of children living with divorced fathers is not as good as that of children with both parents, it is considerably better than the situation of children living with divorced mothers. Their median family income is $18,536, compared with $10,221 for children living with divorced mothers. Given the higher income of families headed by divorced fathers -- and the smaller number of children in the household, these families are less likely to be in poverty. Only 19 percent of the children living with a divorced father are in poverty, compared with 44 percent of the children living with a divorced mother. In fact, nearly 14 percent of the children residing with their divorced father enjoyed incomes of $35,000 or more and nearly five percent enjoyed incomes of $50,000 or more.

Only 4 percent of the children living with divorced fathers received child support, compared with 41 percent of those living with divorced mothers. In addition, only 5 percent received AFDC, and 27 percent received one or more government non-cash income-tested benefit, compared with 27 percent and 55 percent respectively of the children living with a divorced mother. Finally, 56 percent of these children lived in owned rather than rental housing, compared with 42 percent of the children living with a divorced mother. Thus, although they are less likely to receive child support, those children who are living with their divorced father rather than their mother clearly enjoy a number of economic advantages.

Children living with a separated father. The proportion of children living with a separated father is very small -- less than half a percent compared with 5 percent who live with a separated mother. Black children are more likely than whites or Spanish-origin children to live with a separated parent; nevertheless, given a separation children of all groups are much less likely to live with their fathers than their mothers. As is the case for children living with a divorced father, children living with a separated father are disproportionately likely to be the only child in the household (42 percent) and unlikely to have three or more siblings residing with him or her (5 percent).

Though somewhat less affluent than children living with divorced fathers, children living with separated fathers live in considerably higher income families (with a median income of $15,607) than do children living with separated mothers ($6,067). They are correspondingly less likely to live in poverty -- 27 percent compared with 71 percent -- and they are much more likely to live in families with incomes of $35,000 or more.

In keeping with their somewhat higher family incomes, children living with separated fathers are less likely to receive AFDC than children living with separated mothers -- 10 percent compared with 44 percent -- or to receive one or more government non-cash benefits -- 32 compared with 76 percent for children living with separated mothers. Finally, 55 percent of the children living with separated fathers

live in housing that is owned rather than rented, whereas only 30 percent of the children living with separated mothers live in their own homes.

Despite the relative affluence of these father-headed homes compared to mother-headed homes, it is important to note that poverty is considerably more common and affluence is far less likely for children living with divorced or separated fathers than it is for children living with two parents. Thus the low eonomic status of mother-headed households is not simply a result of the difference in male versus female incomes, important as that difference may be. The number of workers in the family is also a factor, as is the higher rate of marital disruption among low income individuals.

Children living with widowed fathers. In keeping with the lower mortality of U.S. women compared with men during middle age, even fewer children live with widowed fathers than live with widowed mothers -- only 0.2 percent -- and the proportion does not vary by race or ethnicity.

As with children living with divorced and separated fathers, children living with widowed fathers are quite likely to have no siblings in the household. While we have speculated that the children living with divorced and separated fathers may have siblings who have remained with the mother, such an explanation cannot hold in the case of children living with their widowed fathers. Two factors may be involved. Childbearing may be truncated by the death of the mother; or, since the probability of widowhood rises with age, the child's siblings may be past the age of 17 and thus not counted in this analysis. In contrast to children living with widowed mothers, a very small proportion of those living with widowed fathers have three or more siblings -- 1.7 percent. Why this should be the case is not evident, although one would note that this estimate is based on a small number of cases, so it is subject to somewhat greater sampling variability.

Children raised by widowed fathers enjoy the highest incomes of all children except for those living two parents. Twenty-three percent live in households with incomes of $35,000 or higher; 11 percent enjoy incomes of $50,000 or more; and 69 percent live in their own home. Presumably their incomes are somewhat higher than those in other father-headed situations because the widowed fathers are slightly older, because widowhood is not so disproportionately found among those with lower incomes (as in other forms of marital dissolution), and perhaps because of insurance or pensions earned by the mother. On the other hand, children living with widowed fathers are much less likely than those living with two parents to enjoy the financial benefits of two incomes.

Despite their rather high median income, a significant proportion of the children reared by widowed fathers are in marginal economic circumstances. Twenty-five percent are in poverty, compared with

less than 13 percent of the children with two parents; and 27 percent receive at least one government non-cash income-tested benefit, compared with 20 percent of the children reared by two parents.

Children living with never-married fathers. Only 0.2 percent of all children live with never-married fathers. Reflecting the higher incidence of out-of-wedlock childbearing among blacks, black children are considerably more likely to live with a never-married father than are white children, though the proportion -- 0.7 percent -- is still very small. Most of these children have no siblings living with them -- 71 percent -- and the average number of sibilings -- 0.4 -- is smaller by half than for children in any other living arrangement.

Children living with a never-married father live in considerably lower income households than do children living with fathers in any other marital status. The median family income for these children is only $7,218 -- comparable to the average income for all mother-alone families. Fifty-two percent of the children who live with their never-married father are in poverty. While only 5 percent receive AFDC, 55 percent receive some type of government benefit. As with children raised by never-married mothers, about a quarter live in a house that is owned rather than rented; again this may reflect a tendency of these families to live with relatives (especially the children's grandparents) who own their own home.

Children Living With Other Relatives

The proportion of children living with relatives but not their parents is small, -- 2.2 percent -- which is comparable to the proportion living with their father only. A considerably higher proportion of black children than white children fall into this category, 5.1 percent compared with 1.6 percent of white children. Given the larger size of the white population, the majority of children living with other relatives are nevertheless white.

Although data are not available in the Current Population Survey on the identity of the other relatives with whom the child resides, it seems likely that many of these people are the child's grandparents. This supposition is supported by the fact that the average age of the mother figure in these households is 47 years. Forty-nine percent of these children have mother figures who are not high school graduates, a proportion which is lower than that for children in any other living arrangement. This situation may be due to the older ages of the mothers and the disproportionate number of blacks in this category.

Children living with other relatives are disproportionately likely to have no siblings residing with them -- 38 percent compared with 21 percent among children living with two parents. However, they are equally likely to have three or more siblings living with them -- 16 compared with 15 percent among children living with two parents.

Like children living with fathers only, those children living with other relatives are somewhat advantaged compared with children living with their mothers alone; but they are not as well-off as children living in two-parent households. The median family income of children living with relatives is not high -- only $14,346. Fifty percent of the children receive some type of government non-cash income-tested benefit, and 15 percent are on AFDC. Nevertheless, 64 percent of the children live in a home that is owned rather than rented, and 13 percent enjoy incomes of $35,000 or higher. It is to be assumed that there is great variation within this group, and it would be useful to be able to divide it into more homogenous sub-groups.

Children Living With Non-Relatives

Of all U.S. children living in households, only 0.5 percent live with non-relatives. Black and Spanish-origin children are slightly more likely to live apart from their relatives: 0.6 percent of each group live with non-relatives compared with 0.4 percent of white children. Although the exact living situation of these children is not known, it is assumed that most of them are in some kind of foster care arrangement. Virtually all of the children appear to live apart from any of their siblings.

Unfortunately, good income data for this category do not exist. One indicator -- housing tenure -- indicates that many may be relatively well off: 63 percent of the children are reported to be living in housing that is owned rather than rented. Furthermore, only 38 percent of these children are reported to be receiving one or more government non-cash benefits.

Discussion and Conclusions

While these analyses can address only a limited subset of the questions one might wish to have answered about the household composition and changing family environments of America's children, it is possible to reach a number of important conclusions.

Most clear is the fact that a very substantial proportion of children today live for at least some period of time with only one parent. In 1983, only three-quarters of all children lived in two-parent families, and many of these contained a step-parent, indicating the existence of a disruption in the past. Nevertheless, a majority of all children lived in two-parent families in 1983.

It is also important to recognize that single-parent families are not all alike. While 20.5 percent of all children live with lone mothers, 2.0 percent live with lone fathers. Among those living with just their mothers, the social and economic status of the family varies greatly depending on the mother's marital status. The children of divorced women, for example, tend to have mothers who are better educated, who have higher labor force participation, and who are more likely to receive child support. Children with widowed

mothers have the highest incomes of those with their mother only, and are the most likely to live in homes that are owned rather than rented. Children with divorced and widowed mothers are also the least likely to receive AFDC and other government non-cash income-tested benefits. The children of separated and particularly of never-married mothers are very disadvantaged, with 71 percent and 81 percent respectively living in poverty.

Compared with children in mother-alone families, those in father-alone families are more likely to have higher family incomes, less likely to receive child support or government assistance, and more likely to live in a home that is owned rather than rented. However, differences that parallel those found in mother-alone families are still apparent between different types of father-alone families. For example, children living with widowers have the highest median family incomes, while children of never-married fathers have the lowest incomes. Nearly a quarter of the children living with widowed fathers enjoy incomes of $35,000 or more, compared with 14 percent of those living with divorced fathers, 6 percent of those living with separated fathers and just over 1 percent of those living with never-married fathers.

Despite the significant social and economic differences between children in varied types of single-parent families, children in two-parent families are better off, as a group, than those in any of the types of single-parent families by all of the economic measures available in these data. Thus, while some individual single-parent families may be doing very well -- 1.9 percent of children in mother-alone and 11.1 percent of those in father-alone families having incomes of $35,000 or more -- overall those children in two-parent families enjoy very real advantages compared with children living with just one parent.

Particularly striking are the very large race differences in family composition. Among whites, 81 percent of all children live in two-parent families, compared with 41 percent among blacks. Black children are disproportionately represented in the most disadvantaged family types, accounting for 69 percent of the children living with never-married mothers and 40 percent of the children living with separated mothers. Black children also account for 36 percent of the children living with relatives other than their parents. Children residing with other relatives may be somewhat better off economically than those in single-parent families, but they are still more than three times as likely to be in poverty as children living with two parents. The extent to which family type causes or results from poverty cannot be assessed with these data; but the associations among race, poverty, and family type are strong and dramatic.

Given the striking social and economic differences between the various family forms, it is important to note that major changes have occurred that affect the number of children in the several family environments. As noted, there are fewer children growing up in single parent households that have resulted from the death of the other parent. More than compensating for this decline, however, have

been increases in the incidence of separation and divorce and non-marital childbearing. On the positive side, other trends have made the circumstances of single-parent households better, particularly the rising education levels of lone parents and a tendency to have fewer children.

Cross-sectional data such as we have been using here inevitably provide only a snap shot perspective on the family environments of children. For example, while a quarter of all children are not now living in two-parent families, a far larger proportion have lived in something other than a two-parent family at some time in the past. Thus the economic and social status of many children may undergo a number of substantial upheavals during the children's formative years. The economic disadvantages faced by many children in single-parent families may not be permanent, as parents secure better jobs or enter remarriages that bring about an increase in the family's living standard. On tne other hand, children in more affluent two-parent families may experience dramatic declines in their economic well-being with the disruption of their parents' marriage (Hoffman, 1977).

Given the very large economic differences associated with changes in family structure, researchers and family practitioners interested in differences in child development should be alert to take account of family structure. Practitioners need to consider the family type of which a child is a part and the recency or number of transitions that a child has experienced in the course of arriving in their current family status. Researchers need to include statistical controls to account for the large economic and social differences betwen family types that might bias conclusions about factors that enhance or undermine child development.

While child-based data describing how children's living arrangements are related to their social and economic status provide important insights into children's changing lives, numerous improvements in data pertinent to children are still needed. For example, for children living with two parents, it is not known whether both parents are the child's biological parents. Since children's outcomes may vary depending upon whether they have two biological parents, adoptive parents, or a step-parent, information on the child's relationship to each parent would be useful. In the case of children living with a step-parent or living with a single parent, it would also be useful to know something about the child's contact with the absent parent. In addition, more information is needed about children living with neither parent. If they live with other relatives, who are these other relatives and how long have they or do they expect to remain in that living arrangement? If the child is living with non-relatives, with whom are they living and how and when did they come to be living in that household? In addition, it is important to collect this information periodically, so trends over time can be tracked.

We have noted the need for longitudinal data, the need to do multivariate analyses, the need to develop more complete data on children, and the importance of collecting data on a regular and predictable schedule (see Zill, Peterson, and Moore, 1984, for a number of recommend- ations). It is important to stress in conclusion, though, how much can be learned by tabulating existing data. The data tabulated for this paper were not collected for the purpose of describing children's lives, yet these child-based tabulations provide considerable illumination of the varied life circumstances of children in different kinds of living arrangements.

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Table 1: U.S. Children, by Family Living Arrangements and Race/Ethnicity, 1983

	All Children		White		Black		Spanish Origin		1970		1980	
	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)
Total	100.0	62,281	100.0	50,873	100.0	9,377	100.0	5,513	100.0	69,162	100.0	61,744
Living Arrangements												
Two Parents	74.9	46,632	81.0	41,231	40.7	3,818	68.5	3,774	85.2	58,939	76.6	47,286
Mother Only	20.5	12,739	15.0	7,616	51.1	4,789	26.8	1,475	10.8	7,451	18.0	11,131
Divorced	8.3	5,190	7.8	3,984	11.3	1,062	8.0	443	3.3	2,296	7.5	4,430
Married, Spouse Absent	5.4	3,334	3.9	1,986	13.5	1,267	9.9	547				
Separated	4.7	2,951	3.4	1,715	12.6	1,184	8.3	460	3.4	2,332	4.9	3,016
Widowed	1.6	1,004	1.4	687	2.8	258	2.3	128	2.0	1,395	2.0	1,260
Never-Married	5.2	3,212	1.9	958	23.5	2,203	6.5	357	0.8	527	2.8	1,721
Father Only	2.0	1,267	2.0	998	2.5	234	1.8	99	1.1	748	1.7	1,031
Divorced	1.1	691	1.2	608	0.8	78	1.0	54	0.3	177	0.8	503
Married, Spouse Absent	0.5	306	0.4	213	0.9	81	0.2	11				
Separated	0.4	258	0.4	188	0.7	67	0.2	11	0.2	152	0.4	235
Widowed	0.2	116	0.2	90	0.2	15	0.2	13	0.4	254	0.3	172
Never-Married	0.2	154	0.2	87	0.7	61	0.4	21	-	30	0.1	75
Other Relatives	2.2	1,349	1.6	815	5.1	482	2.4	130	2.2	1,547	3.1	1,914
Non-Relatives	0.5	293	0.4	213	0.6	54	0.6	35	0.7	477	0.6	382

Source: March 1983, Current Population Survey, special tabulations by the Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

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Table 2: Children in Different Living Arrangements, by Race and by Education of Mother, 1983

		Race and Ethnicity			Education of Mother	
		Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Spanish Origin	<High School	≥ 4 College
Total	62,281	81.7	15.1	8.9	23.6	12.6
Living Arrangements						
Two Parents	46,632	88.4	8.2	8.1	19.8	15.0
Mother Only	12,739	59.8	37.6	11.6	36.5	6.4
Divorced	5,190	76.7	20.5	8.5	26.4	9.3
Separated	2,951	58.1	40.1	15.6	42.1	4.1
Widowed	1,004	68.4	25.7	12.7	38.5	8.1
Never-Married	3,212	29.8	68.6	11.1	47.9	2.0
Father Only	1,267	78.8	18.5	7.8	-	-
Divorced	691	88.0	11.3	7.8	-	-
Separated	258	72.9	26.0	4.3	-	-
Widowed	116	77.6	12.9	11.2	-	-
Never-Married	154	56.5	39.6	13.6	-	-
Other Relatives	1,349	60.4	35.7	9.6	49.1	3.6
Non-Relatives	293	72.7	18.4	11.9	-	-

Source: March 1983, Current Population Survey, special tabulations by the Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table 3: Children in Different Living Arrangements, by Number of Siblings and Age of Mother

		Mean # Siblings	% With No Siblings	% With 3+ Siblings	Average Age of Mothers	Percent Mothers <20
Total		1.37	23.8	15.1	34.51	1.4
Living Arrangements						
Two Parents	46,632	1.41	20.9	15.2	34.65	0.7
Mother Only	12,739	1.33	28.5	16.0	32.99	3.1
Divorced	5,190	1.22	28.4	11.9	34.85	0.2
Separated	2,951	1.61	20.5	22.6	33.08	0.9
Widowed	1,004	1.48	28.6	20.1	41.93	-
Never-Married	3,212	1.20	36.6	14.9	27.11	12.1
Father Only	1,267	0.75	47.2	4.9	-	-
Divorced	691	0.77	46.3	4.9	-	-
Separated	258	0.79	42.2	4.7	-	-
Widowed	116	0.77	42.2	1.7	-	-
Never-Married	154	0.38	70.8	-	-	-
Other Relatives	1,349	1.23	38.0	15.6	46.77	-
Group Quarters or Non-Relatives	293	-	-	-	-	-

Source: March 1983, Current Population Survey, special tabulations by the Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table 4: Children in Different Living Arrangements, by Mother's Employment Status, Income, and Home Ownership

		Mother in Labor Force				Income			
		Total	Full-Time Full-Year	Other Employment	Looked for Work	Median Income	≥$35,000	≥$50,000	Percent Living in Owned Housing
Total	62,281	62.3	23.4%	35.3%	3.6%	-	23.3%	8.7%	66.5%
Living Arrangements									
Two Parents	46,632	63.4	22.4	38.5	2.5	26,672	29.9	11.3	75.1
Mother Only	12,739	67.8	30.3	29.2	8.3	7,069	1.9	0.3	36.1
Divorced	5,190	80.9	43.1	31.3	6.5	10,221	2.6	0.5	41.9
Separated	2,951	64.5	25.2	30.1	9.2	6,067	0.8	0.1	29.8
Widowed	1,004	57.9	23.4	27.2	7.3	11,765	8.0	1.3	61.8
Never-Married	3,212	52.9	17.2	24.9	10.8	4,383	0.1	-	26.0
Father Only	1,267	-	-	-	-	15,980	11.1	3.7	53.0
Divorced	691	-	-	-	-	18,536	13.5	4.5	55.7
Separated	258	-	-	-	-	15,607	6.2	1.2	55.0
Widowed	116	-	-	-	-	20,028	23.3	11.2	69.0
Never-Married	154	-	-	-	-	7,218	1.3	-	24.0
Other Relatives	1,349	-	-	-	-	14,346	13.3	4.7	64.0
Non-Relatives	293	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	63.1

Source: March 1983, Current Population Survey, special tabulations by the Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table 5: Children in Different Living Arrangements, by Mother's Income and Poverty Status, Receipt of Child Support, AFDC, and Government Benefits

		Percent in Poverty	Percent Receiving Child Support	Percent Receiving AFDC	Receiving 1 or More Government Non-Cash Benefits
Total	62,281	23.5%	7.6%	10.2%	30.8%
Living Arrangements					
Two Parents	46,632	12.5	3.6	3.0	20.2
Mother Only	12,739	60.1	22.9	36.7	67.2
Divorced	5,190	44.2	41.0	26.7	55.1
Separated	2,951	70.7	19.7	43.5	75.6
Widowed	1,004	43.9	0.9	10.7	56.9
Never-Married	3,212	80.8	5.0	56.8	83.8
Father Only	1,267	25.8	2.1	6.3	32.0
Divorced	691	19.4	3.6	4.8	27.1
Separated	258	27.1	0.8	9.7	31.8
Widowed	116	25.0	-	12.1	27.6
Never-Married	154	51.9	-	5.8	54.5
Other Relatives	1,349	39.7	11.5	15.2	50.0
Non-Relatives	293	-	-	-	38.2

* The income tested non-cash benefits are as follows: free or reduced-price school lunches, Food Stamps, Medicaid and subsidized housing. Nearly all AFDC recipients also receive medicaid benefits, so most AFDC recipients are subsumed under this heading.

Source: March 1983, Current Population Survey, special tabulations by the Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Social and Economic Correlates of Family Structure:
A Portrait of U.S. Children in 1983

Highlights

*Although the proportion of children living with two parents has declined in recent decades, in 1983, 75 percent lived with two parents--81 percent of white children, 41 percent of black children, and 69 percent of Spanish origin children.

*Only 2 percent of all U.S. children lived with their father only in 1983.

*Twenty-one percent of all children live with their mother only--15 percent of white children, 51 percent of black children, and 27 percent of Spanish origin children.

*Children living with two parents were the best off economically. Children living with never-married and separated mothers were the worst off economically. Median family income in 1983 was $26,672 for children in 2 parent families and 30 percent had incomes over $35,000. Corresponding statistics for other groups of children are:

$10,221 and	2.6%	for children living with a divorced mother;
$ 6,067 and	0.8%	for children living with a separated mother;
$ 4,383 and	0.1%	for children living with a never-married mother;
$18,536 and	13.5%	for children living with a divorced father;
$15,607 and	6.2%	for children living with a separated father;
$ 7,218 and	1.37%	for children living with a never-married father

*Eighty-one percent of the children living with a never-married mother are in poverty, as are 71 percent of those living with a divorced mother. Less than 13 percent of the children in two-parent families are in poverty.

*Receipt of one or more government non-cash income-tested benefits (including Food Stamps, Medicaid, subsidized housing, & free or reduced-price school lunches) is highly related to the proportion in poverty. Eighty-four percent of the children living with their never-married mothers receive one or more benefits, as do 55 percent of the children living with a divorced mother, but only 3 percent of the children living with two parents.

*Forty-one percent of the children living with a divorced mother receive some child support, compared to 18 percent of the children living with a separated mother and 5 percent of the children living with a never-married mother.

*Of children living with two parents in 1983, 63 percent had mothers in the labor force but only 22 percent had mothers who worked full-time all year. Of children with divorced mothers, 81 percent had mothers who were in the labor force and 43 had mothers who worked full-time all year.

Child Trends, Inc.
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